

**For Immediate Release:** 12/10/2012

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## **Washington Health Benefit Exchange Awarded Conditional Blueprint Approval**

*Washington One of Six States to Achieve Status from Dept. of Health & Human Services*

**OLYMPIA, Wash. - Dec. 10, 2012** - The Washington Health Benefit Exchange today announced it has received conditional approval of its state-based Exchange Blueprint from the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS). The Blueprint outlines how the Exchange will be ready to operate Washington Healthplanfinder, the State's online health insurance marketplace, starting Oct. 1, 2013.

"This is a testament to ongoing health reform efforts here in Washington State," said Richard Onizuka, Chief Executive Officer for Washington Healthplanfinder. "While there is still much work to be done, we are confident we will meet the necessary requirements to open our doors for business on Oct. 1 of next year."

To receive conditional approval, the Washington Health Benefit Exchange was required to demonstrate significant progress but can take additional time to complete one or more of the approval requirements, which range from operational to legal activities needed to support the Exchange. An agreement was also developed that outlines the timeline for expected milestones and regular progress reviews to ensure all remaining requirements are met.

"Thanks to Sec. Kathleen Sebelius, a great partner, for her leadership on an issue that will make a fundamental difference in the lives of millions of Americans," said Governor Gregoire. "This conditional approval is a significant validation of the work that we've done to get our state's health insurance exchange up and running. We are clearly ahead of the curve and well positioned to remain a national leader on health care reform. Through our exchange, we will offer coverage to more than 200,000 uninsured Washingtonians and boost competition in the marketplace. The exchange will bring lower prices to consumers and small businesses, improve health outcomes and lower costs for all of us."

The Exchange worked closely with HHS to submit its Blueprint and application on Oct. 10, 2012 - more than one month before the original Nov. 16 federal deadline. It is one of only six states to achieve the status thus far. Other states included Ore., Mass., Md., Colo. and Conn.

"We would like to thank HHS for their continued partnership throughout this process," said Pam MacEwan, Interim Policy Director for Washington Healthplanfinder. "It was only through our close collaboration that we were able to achieve this important milestone."

Under the Affordable Care Act, HHS must approve or conditionally approve state-based Exchanges by Jan. 1, 2013, for operation in 2014. More information about Washington Healthplanfinder and the Washington Health Benefit Exchange is available at [www.hca.wa.gov/hbe](http://www.hca.wa.gov/hbe).

## **About Washington Healthplanfinder**

Washington Healthplanfinder will be a new online marketplace for individuals, families and small businesses in Washington to compare and enroll in health insurance coverage and gain access to tax credits, reduced cost sharing, and public programs such as Medicaid. Washington Healthplanfinder will begin enrolling consumers on October 1, 2013, for health insurance coverage beginning on January 1, 2014.

## **About the Washington Health Benefit Exchange**

The Washington Health Benefit Exchange is a public-private partnership established in accordance with the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 (ACA) with the goal to redefine people's experience with health care through the creation of a new health insurance marketplace for individuals and small businesses. The Exchange is separate from the state and governed by an independent 11-member board appointed by Gov. Gregoire in December 2011.

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